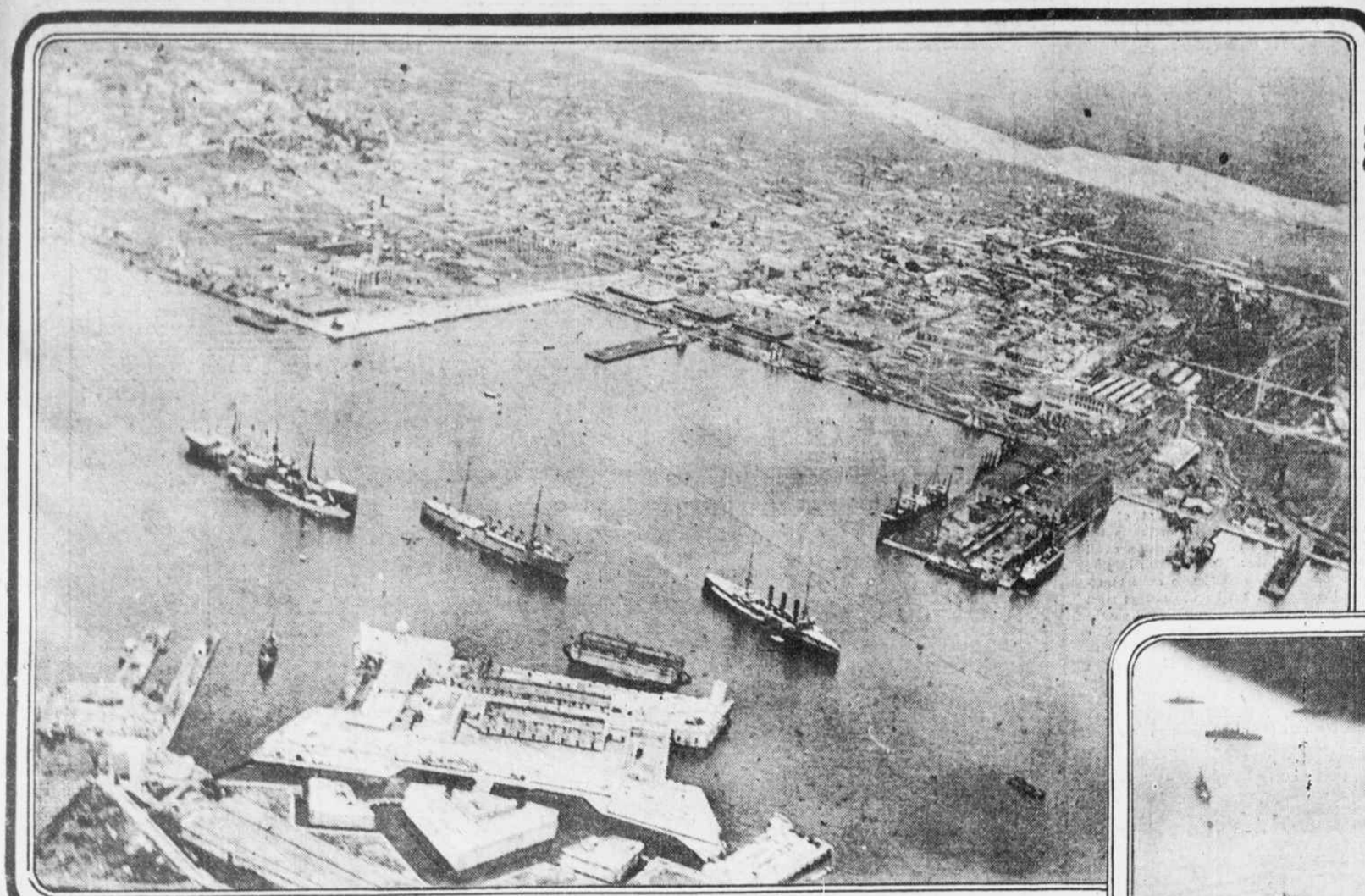
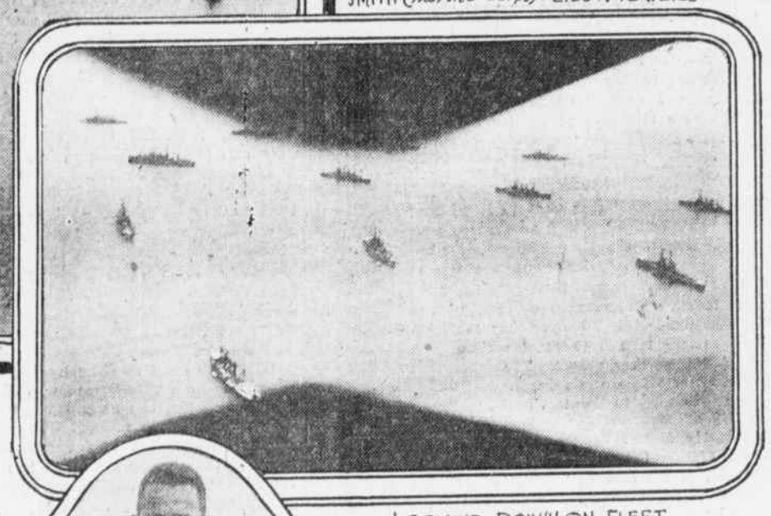
FLYING OVER VERA CRUZ WITH UNCLE SAM'S BIRDMEN



LOOKING DOWN ON SAN JUAN DE ULLUA and VERA CRUZ

The AVIATORS CAMP ON SHORE VERA CRUZ
Left to Right: CAPT. MUSTIN, LIEUT. BELLINGER, LIEUT. LANGLEY, ARTHUR RUHL, LIEUT. SMITH (marine corps) LIEUT. TOWERS



LOOKING DOWN ON FLEET VERA CRUZ
(THE SHADOWS ARE CAUSED BY THE BELLOWS OF THE CAMERA BEING DRIVEN IN BY THE FORCE OF THE WIND)

Arthur Ruhl Discusses His Thrilling Experience in a Flying Boat Piloted by Ensign Chevalier—Wonderful View of the Old Mexican Prison, the Harbor and City.

By ARTHUR RUHL.

Vera Cruz, June 12.

NO DOUBT Ensign Chevalier, U. S. N., is but an everyday human being, like anybody else. He swims like a dolphin, to be sure, as everybody knows who ever tried to play water polo against him; runs—or did, at any rate, in his cinderpath days—like the startled hind; and he turns an aeroplane into a sentient being as blithe and carefree as himself.

Sky, earth and water appear to be equally his home and he brings to each a well made, well tanned body and quick, vivid glance and smile which few popular novelists, without the sternest self-restraint, could describe without saying something about a faun or a Greek god. But the army and navy—not to speak more specifically of the aviation squad—are full of young men who would put our fictionists to similar strain, so it is doubtless true that young Chevalier is but a regular American from Ogdensburg, N. Y. Yet at the moment of writing this I find it somehow difficult to feel so.

Chevalier and I were birds together this morning, or, rather, he was the bird and I was the helpless passenger. We have been to another world and back, and though I have ducked him under water since and tried to drag him back to earth as much as possible he still seems a little apart and resplendent, touched with the radiance of that thinner, upper ether.

DANGLING 2,000 FEET ABOVE THE TROPICAL OCEAN.

You go along living for an æon or two and learning more and more about navigating a strange and interesting world, then one bright morning find yourself dangling in space a couple thousand feet above the tropical ocean. Super-Dreadnoughts below are mere pumpkin seeds on a blue floor, steamers and "kickers" ploughing shoreward from the battleships no more than gnats drawing little V-shaped wakes behind them. Human beings have all but disappeared, little masts, towers and domes, all one's whole usual up-and-down world flattened to a map, remote and creepily silent.

Poised there, as it seems, roaring and beating against a hurricane that snatches the words from your teeth and flings them far astern before the man at your side can catch them, with the empty world yawning below you, you could not be more helpless under water or on the moon. None of your experiences will help you now. You may know how to try a case or write a play or get to Congress or make a million dollars, but that will not help in the least to bring these great swaying planes down the long hill of empty air to that far-off, cool ocean floor.

THE DEBONAIR AVIATOR ENTIRELY SURROUNDED BY HALO.

Only this smiling young man can do that, leaning back as much at ease as if he had picked just you up in his runabout at some suburban station. He motions down with one hand, and slowly, with a dreadful list—graceful as a gull, no doubt, from below—the great planes swing over and downward. Oh, yes, he'll get you there all right; it's all in the day's work; but he can scarcely be expected to appear quite commonplace, for another twenty-four hours, at any rate!

A part of this glamour results, no doubt, from the peculiar construction of A-3. I have been up in the air with Orville Wright at Dayton, round and round the old cow pasture where the two brothers worked so long and quietly making history, before history took the trouble to pay any attention to them.

In the Wright machine the seat is placed so far back that one sits, as it were, on the lower plane—has the comfortable illusion, at any rate, of something solid underneath, as if one were sitting on the edge of a roof. There is a vertical stanchion to grip with your right hand; there is—or was, in that machine—a diagonal guy wire which passed across the passenger's chest and held him in as firmly as the strap holds a baby in its perambulator. You couldn't fall off if you wanted to.

The "dying boats" used by the navy aviators at Vera Cruz are even more consoling. Pilot and passenger sit side by side in a sort of decked-over canoe, much as they would sit in a low-hung racing automobile. Only one's head sticks out, and stretched at ease one may lean over the gunwale and watch the world fly by as one would look out of a car window.

We had tried one of these the afternoon before, but there was no wind to rise against, the drenching from the all night rain had not done the engines any good and after "porpoising" back and forth across the bay until we were soaked with spray Chevalier decided that there was no use trying to get up with two people that day. The air was still quiet this morning, and so we took the light hydro-aeroplane A-3, which can leap off the water with its two passengers, however sleepy the weather.

A hydroplane, by the way, contrary to popular notion, is not an air machine at all, but a motor-boat, which, at top speed, has little more than its propeller in the water. The hydro-aeroplane is an aeroplane with slender pontoons underneath, scarcely more than hollow skids, just enough to keep it afloat. And the seats in A-3, instead of being set back over the lower plane, were placed forward, out over the wide, wide world.

There was neither stanchion nor guy wire, only a strap, or yoke, to slip across one's shoulders, and even the slender back of the seat bends from

ENSIGN G. DE C. CHEVALIER

LOOKING DOWN ON SAN JUAN DE ULLUA AND VERA CRUZ

side to side with the bending of the ailerons. This is all very well for the pilot as a means of giving him the "feel" of the great bird. As it dips to one side his instinctive leaning in the other direction gives the aileron on the lower side the proper depressing pull, but it adds little to the ease of the landlubber looking for something to hang on to ere he says farewell to mother earth. Moreover, in order that the operator may not be distracted by the squirming of the hapless passenger—disturbed perhaps, when the big bird strikes a sharp upcurrent or drops into an air pocket—the connecting rod between the two seats is unhooked unless a pupil is taking a lesson. As Chevalier, wishing to help me with my camera, hospitably put it, "You can lean out as far as you want to, that way"—"that way" being directly out into space.

In short, if one were sitting on a stool in front of a shop counter and the stool suddenly detached itself from the floor and whizzed skyward, one could scarcely feel more "out in the air" than in the passenger's seat of this hydro-aeroplane.

However, all the more like a regular b[illegible] regular daily scouting begun. The disadvantage of this arrangement was that the engines, with only bits of tarpaulin to cover them, and the delicate fabric of the wings were put to the alternate drenching and baking of the tropical rainy season; the advantage was a comfortable camp and plenty of still water within the breakwater, from which to get into the air.

Over this stretch of water we went bounding and splashing, passed the little white Eagle, which started as a yacht and has been steaming up and down the coast and all over the Caribbean as part of the navy these fifteen years: then, faster and faster, with the turn to the left, bore down on the British Hermoine and the Spaniard, Don Carlos V; then, just as the breakwater dead ahead was drawing near enough to be thought of, the splashing suddenly stopped, the sea dropped below, open sky raised in front of us—and we were flying.

The breakwater slid under a hundred feet below. Without any sensation of climbing and little of going fast, we roared and pushed against that strange invisible barrier, while all the time the wind flung itself past our ears, the blue sea floor dropped further and further away and out in front was nothing but the empty east.

Chevalier, shrunk comfortably into his seat as if he were driving a motor through some quiet park on a summer evening, turned with his quick smile. Doubtless he was curious to see whether this sudden leap from terra firma had induced in his patient any intentions of jumping off. If people feel like jumping from solid high towers they would waste no time at all, one might think, in diving from their perch on A-3. There was a little brace on either side, something like a chair arm, and having attained this, one was able to achieve a grin.

"How fast are we going?" I yelled. The first time, though Chevalier's ear was not more than six inches from me, the gale snatched the words away and flung them astern. The second time he managed to catch them.

"About fifty-eight," he said.

Directly under us now on the cool blue Gulf, as flat as so much watered silk, were drawn the straight lines of the fleet. From shore, or riding out in one of their steamers, the battleships seem strewn about without much method—from our lookout the lines stood out as regularly as fence posts. Super-Dreadnoughts and all, they were the same little flat pumpkin seeds now and strangely still on that distant blue-green floor.

ALONG THE HIGHROADS OF THE UPPER WORLD.

Across them, so quaintly tiny and unimportant contrasted with this limitless upper world, we swung and out over the sea beyond. Chevalier gave the wheel the least little right hand turn—that cautious "feeling" turn, with which these great machines, so powerful and yet so tender, are handled. Round we drew to the southward and bore down on the lower end of the line, toward the great New York, Arkansas and Wyoming, with their five turrets of sixteen-inch guns, like half toothpicks, laid in pairs along the deck. Toward them and the coast of Mexico.

To fly here in the early morning, with the fleet below, Vera Cruz spread beyond and the cool snow peak of Orizaba taking the first sun far behind and above the green tierra caliente, must be flying indeed. In clear, dry season weather, and in early morning often in the rainy season, the view approaching Vera Cruz is one of the most beautiful in all Mexico. It was nearly noon now, however, and though the town blazed in sunlight the mountains were banked with the usual midday rainy season clouds.

THE DEADLY RIGHT HAND TURN—SENSITIVE, CLUMSY PLANES.

The newspapers used to talk about the "deadly right hand turn"—those must have been other machines or other pilots, for we swung round to the land as steady as church. It was startling to see how slight a command the great clumsy planes obeyed. Chevalier motioned for me to take the extra wheel, and for a mile or so we drummed on as if we were running on a track, while all Chevalier did was now and then to nudge the wheel with one thumb. The big bird was, in reality, almost flying by itself.

Birdlike as she seems, however, as one looks up from blazing streets to see her sailing across the blue there can never be quite the same illusion for those actually in the machine until some one invents a silent engine and succeeds in keeping afloat at ten or fifteen instead of from forty-five to a hundred miles an hour. There is always the deafening roar and sense of effort, the gale pushing into one's face to remind one of the tremendous speed required to keep this dead weight afloat.

It is only when the power is turned off and the great roc dips its head and coasts down that hill of air, or, just before alighting, sails level just above the water, that one has that delightful sense of skimming without effort through space.

The Wright machine is able to fly much slower than the Curtiss—it flies easily at forty-five miles and has flown, I believe, as slowly as twenty-four, or thereabouts. The Curtiss cannot fly much below sixty miles an hour. On the other hand, it is faster, the Curtiss pilots say, when speed is wanted—and speed is important in scouting—and its controls (the wheel, instead of levers, and the ailerons worked by the shoulders) are more natural and easily learned.

AERIAL IMPRESSIONS OF BEACH, TENTS AND VERA CRUZ.

The long arc of yellow beach drew under, disappearing in haze to north and south, the little tan dots of tents from which we had climbed, the neat checkerboard of Vera Cruz, with its gray-white and bluish domes and towers. The sand hills encircling the town—the hills from which Scott shelled the city in '47 and along which, facing the other way, are drawn our outposts now—were flattened down to the whitish patches. At a glance you might have taken them for ponds. Beyond them, to the south, toward the Tejar pumping station, there were ponds, and eight or ten miles away the silver ribbon of a river. A little over the rim of coast we turned again, and at eighteen hundred feet swung back across the harbor.

Four destroyers, anchored side by side and all but hidden by awnings, looked particularly quaint—they might have been four caterpillars or four particularly slim little sheep huddled in the hot sun.

To the left lay the old fort of San Juan de Ulua, emerging, so to speak, from all the stories that have been told about it, into the original lines of the stronghold it once was. Every one has heard of the horrors of its crypt-like dungeons and most newspaper readers doubtless think of it merely as a sort of Monte Cristo prison rather than the Gibraltar it was supposed to be in the old Spanish days—the fort which held out for a two weeks' siege even in Scott's time.

PHOTOGRAPHING THE OLD FORT OF SAN JUAN DE ULUA.

Instead of a haphazard collection of mouldering old walls, it reveals itself from above a symmetrical rectangle with bastioned corners, a moat and protected causeway. I took a few photographs of it—not very successfully, for it is all but impossible with the ordinary folding camera to keep the wind from blowing in the collapsible part and shutting off part of the image.

Back again we travelled until finally, somewhere over the tan dots of the aviation camp, Chevalier motioned downward with his right hand. He was ready for the glide. We were on a left-hand turn at the time, and keeping it he pulled the hinged shaft of the wheel a bit toward him. At once the great planes dipped frontward and we were looking over our feet straight down to the ocean.

With a sharp list to the left, and so steeply inclined that one had the sensation of leaning back to keep from pitching forward, we went curving down. Strangely slow it seemed—yet the blue ocean floor, masts, funnels, roofs, all the familiar up-and-down world was spreading out, reassuming its up-and-downness, sweeping terrifically up to meet us.

THE GIFTED TAN ARMS OF YOUNG MR. CHEVALIER.

All the way round the axis of the curve—it was here, perhaps, that young Mr. Chevalier's tanned forearms seemed most gifted, as they drew banking angle, speed along the curve and vertical drop into one bright synthesis. Half way round again, then suddenly we straightened out; there was a moment's realization of tremendous speed as we sailed close over the water—and we were landing like a bird. At once the propellers took up their roar; we whirled about and swept back to the beach we had left half an hour before.

"Pretty spiral, Chevy!" somebody said, and that doubtless is the way to describe it rather than muddling it over with the irrelevant sensations of an outsider. For, after all, people turn somersaults in aeroplanes nowadays.

UNEQUAL TERMS.

Mrs. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, apropos of the recent hot discussion on the value of the housekeeping as against the cultured wife, told at the Colony Club, in New York, this story.

"A young man of reactionary tendencies had proposed to a girl, and she had accepted him. The young man then began, in his cautious, reactionary way, to question her like this:

"'I promised mother, darling, that I would never marry a girl who was not a good housekeeper. Tell me, can you make pies?'

"'Yes,' the girl answered, 'I took the "cordon bleu" course in Paris after my graduation from Vassar, and I can make all kinds of pies, even the genuine puff paste sort.'

"'Good,' he said. 'And can you dressmake? I am not rich, you know.'

"'I understand dressmaking thoroughly,' she answered. 'In fact, M. Poiret, in whose atelier I studied, is ready to try me out as a sub-designer.'

"'You jewel! And can you'——

"'Wait a minute,' said the girl coolly. 'It's my turn, please. Let me now ask you a question. Do you know how to light a kitchen range, polish a hardwood floor and beat carpet?'

"'The—er—the maids would do all that,' said the young man.

"'Can you sweep chimneys,' she pursued, 'clean silver'——

"'I am not a domestic servant,' he interrupted coldly.

The girl gave a loud, harsh laugh.

"'Well, and neither am I,' she said. 'We seem to be marrying, however, with the idea of making domestic servants of each other, and I am so much superior in the business that I don't think such a match would be fair to me. Go and learn your trade, if you care to—butler or valet—so that you can talk to me on equal terms. Till then—good afternoon.'"

NOT NEEDED.

Discussing the New York immigration bureau's mistakes—the mistake, for example, of taking Mrs. Flora Steele, the novelist, for a victim of senile dementia—Mrs. Havelock Ellis told a story.

"A famous surgeon," she began, "met a young man in Fifth av.

"'Hello!' the surgeon said. 'You're looking well!'

"'And, doctor, I feel good,' was the reply.

"The surgeon said, 'You didn't look like this nine months ago, laid out on my operating table. Do you know I've got a big chunk of your brain in a jar in my office?

"'Well, that's all right, doctor,' said the young man. 'I don't need it. I've got a job in the immigration department at Ellis Island now.'"

MOVE MORE QUIETLY.

Squire—But the poor are no longer ground beneath the iron heel of the oppressor [illegible]

Yokel—No, in this age of luxury the oppressors wear rubber heels.—Tit-